

In this paper, I argue that quasi-human chimpanzee behavior in anthropogenic environments can provide a test case for philosophical accounts of human and nonhuman intentionality. In particular, I use three studies on chimpanzee behavior—bipedal walking, waiting at roads, disabling traps—to contrastively analyze Joseph Rouse’s account of discursive niche construction with Markus Wild’s biosemantic approach to intentionality.

Rouse claims that nonhuman intentionality is *one-dimensionally normative*: because behavior is closely coupled to the selective environment, there is no difference between how the animal takes the world to be and how the world objectively is. In contrast, human intentionality is *two-dimensionally normative*: humans adjust their behavior both to environmental features and their own and others’ vocal patterns about these features. Wild claims that with regard to intentionality, there is no such difference. The normativity of both human and nonhuman intentionality can be biosemantically explained by the naturally selected *proper function* of the mechanism that consumes the representational vehicle produced by another mechanism. For instance: when a chimp identifies nuts as *food*, the proper function of the digestive system determines the representational content (“edible ting”) of the vehicle (“brown round thing”) produced by the visual system.

The contrastive analysis shows that Rouse’s and Wild’s theories can both account for chimpanzee’s walking bipedally to raid human crops and waiting at dangerous man-made roads. The third example of chimpanzees disabling snare traps, however, fits well into Wild’s biosemantic analysis, but is difficult to accommodate in Rouse’s account. On Wild’s view, chimpanzees correctly represent the snare as dangerous if the vehicle produced by vision is consumed by the motor system such that the chimpanzee shakes the branch instead of the wire. In contrast, Rouse’s one-dimensional normative analysis cannot account for the fact that disabling traps involves a gap between how chimpanzees take different trap components to be and how the trap is objectively is.

I conclude that while the snare example weakly favors Wild’s to Rouse’s approach when explaining quasi-human chimpanzee behavior, the varying evidential status of the examples is crucial to properly evaluate the empirical support of philosophical accounts of human and nonhuman intentionality.